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ABSTRACT

This paper compares freshmen who enrolled in the College Seminar at Ramapo College (a 4-year liberal arts college in New Jersey) with freshmen who have not taken the seminar. The seminar course includes units on higher education in America; study skills (e.g., writing papers, research skills, taking notes, time management, computer skills); communication and interpersonal skills (e.g., avoiding date rape, solving disputes); substance abuse; stress management; values clarification; volunteerism; discrimination and other minority issues; and career planning. The study's data include responses from 68 percent, 80 percent, and 80 percent of the 1986, 1987, and 1988 freshmen cohorts (ranging from 400 to 500 students) respectively. Retention rates into the subsequent years of college favored those students who enrolled in the seminar. Of eight variables analyzed to predict cumulative grade point average after four semesters in college, the best predictor was "grade and enrollment in College Seminar." Students who took the course attended more events on campus, belonged to more extracurricular organizations, felt more comfortable approaching faculty, spoke with faculty more frequently outside of class, and were more familiar with college support services. The paper concludes that students who have taken the seminar bonded more to the institution and experienced more benefits in both the academic and personal spheres. (JDD)

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ED 374 741

Retention, Bonding, And Academic Achievement: Effectiveness of the College Seminar in Promoting College Success

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I will share data I have been collecting since 1986 that compare freshmen who enrolled in the College Seminar at Ramapo College with freshmen who have not taken the seminar. I will describe the Freshman Seminar program, report on retention data, grade point averages (GPAs), graduation rates, and data from questionnaires which indicate that students who have taken the seminar bonded more to the institution and experienced more benefits in both the academic and personal spheres than students who have not taken the College Seminar.

Ramapo College, a four-year, liberal arts college in New Jersey, enrolls 400 to 500 freshmen each year. The College Seminar was first offered in the fall 1986 semester. We used texts by Gardner & Jewler (College Is Only The Beginning) and earlier editions of STARKE'S (STRATEGIES FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS, Prentice Hall 1993).

The course includes units on higher education in America, study skills (e.g., writing papers, research skills, taking notes, time management, computer skills), communication and interpersonal skills (e.g., avoiding date rape, solving disputes), substance abuse, stress management, values clarification, volunteerism, discrimination and other minority issues, and career planning.

Like most colleges in America today, Ramapo is faced with an increasingly heterogeneous student body that enters the institution with varying degrees of college preparation. Many lack an understanding of the skills and attitudes necessary to succeed in college. A recent survey of 1700 institutions of higher education reports that **30 percent of America's freshmen are dropping out during their first year of college, and less than 55 percent are remaining in college long enough to graduate.** We designed the College Seminar to introduce our students to some of the information, expectations, and skills necessary to persist and succeed in college.

In 1986 approximately half of the entering freshmen enrolled in the College Seminar, and half did not. Retention rates into the sophomore year greatly favored those students who enrolled in the seminar over those who did not. This advantage held true and even increased by the senior year.

After 1987 all freshmen were required to enroll in the seminar. Retention rates for those cohorts were significantly higher than the rates for freshmen entering in years before the seminar was offered.

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In some comparisons, persistence rates favored seminar enrollees by as much as 33 percent percentage points per year; Retention figures consistently favored freshmen who enrolled in the seminar. This association between enrollment in the College Seminar and persistence in college held true for African-American and Hispanic students as well as for White students. The graduation rate for students who enrolled in the seminar the first year was two-an-a-half times greater than the rate for their peers who did not take the seminar. All of these differences are impressive, and they are also statistically significant.

The results of surveys that have been distributed to freshmen since 1986 may explain the higher persistence rates of students who enrolled in the College Seminar. We found that students who took the course attended more events on campus, belonged to more extracurricular organizations, felt more comfortable approaching faculty if they encountered a problem, spoke with faculty more frequently outside of class, and were more familiar with college support services. The differences between the two groups of students were again statistically significant.

Data from the American College Testing program revealed that freshmen at Ramapo acquired significantly more positive attitudes towards the faculty and advisors than freshmen at other public colleges. Freshmen were particularly satisfied with the attitude of the faculty towards students, with the availability of their advisors, with the value of the information provided by their advisors, and with the concern for them as individuals.

Students who enrolled in College Seminar also performed significantly better in their studies. Data on eight variables for freshmen entering in 1986 and 1987 were entered into a multiple regression analysis to determine the best combination of variables for predicting cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) after four semesters in college. The set of independent variables included SAT scores and high school rank, grade and enrollment in College Seminar, sex, residency (commuter or campus resident), enrollment in the Educational Opportunity Program, assignment to remedial courses in reading, writing, or arithmetic, and participation in the athletic program.

Grade and enrollment in College Seminar was the best predictor of cumulative GPA accounting for 32 percent of the variability. Students who received A, B, or C in the seminar achieved significantly higher GPAs ($X = 2.51$) than students who did not take the seminar or received D or F in the course ($X = 1.41$). The regression coefficients were also significantly different from zero for Academic Index, sex, and Verbal SAT score. Together with grade and enrollment in the seminar, these variables accounted for 39 percent of the variance in GPA.

These data suggest that a strong cause-and-effect relationship may exist between enrollment in the college seminar and important benefits to both the students and the institution.

STARKE, MARY
February, 1993

Table 1

RETENTION DATA FOR FIRSTTIME FULLTIME FRESHMEN

Students Who Did Not Enroll In Freshman Seminar

	%Rtnd Sph Yr	%Rtnd Jr Yr	%Rtnd Sr Yr	%Grad After 4 Yrs	Cum % Grad + Rtnd To 5th Yr	Cum % Grad After 5 Yrs	Cum % Grad + Rtnd To 6th Yr	Cum % Grad After 6 Yrs
'85 Cohort	58%	37%	34%	14%	32%	29%	50%	31%
'86 Cohort	51%	36%	32%	7%	14%	14%	32%	20%

Students Who Enrolled In Freshman Seminar

	%Rtnd Sph Yr	%Rtnd Jr Yr	%Rtnd Sr Yr	% Grad After 4 Yrs	Cum % Grad + Rtnd To 5th Yr	Cum % Grad After 5 Yrs	Cum % Grad + Rtnd To 6th Yr	Cum % Grad After 6 Yrs
'86 Cohort	79%	61%	59%	21%	40%	46 %	53%	50%
'87 Cohort	74%	55%	51%	15%	47%	34 %	44%	N Y A
'88 Cohort	68%	53%	48%	16%	44%	Not Yet Available		
'89 Cohort	70%	54%	50%	Not Yet Available				
'90 Cohort	68%	49%	Not Yet Available					
'91 Cohort	73%	Not Yet Available						

STARKE, MARY
June, 1990

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RETENTION DATA FOR FIRSTTIME FULLTIME FRESHMEN

Students Who Did Not Enroll In Freshman Seminar

	% Retained To Sophomore Year	% Retained To Junior Year	% Retained To Senior Year	% Graduated in 4 Years (June)
1985 Cohort	58%	37%	34%	10%
1986 Cohort	51%	36%	32%	7%

Students Who Enrolled In Freshman Seminar

	% Retained To Sophomore Year	% Retained To Junior Year	% Retained To Senior Year	
1986 Cohort	79%	61%	59%	19%
1987 Cohort	74%	55%	Not Yet Available	
1988 Cohort	69%	Not Yet Available		

CHI SQUARE TESTS FOR STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN COLLEGE PERSISTENCE AND ENROLLMENT IN FRESHMAN SEMINAR

Retention To Sophomore Year

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1987 Cohort (99% Took Seminar)
58% vs 74% ^ = 16% pts. $x^2 = 24.52$ $p < .001$

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1988 Cohort (99% Took Seminar)
58% vs 69% ^ = 11 % pts. $x^2 = 10.94$ $p < .001$

Fall 1986 Cohort: 46% Students Who Took Seminar vs 54% Who Did Not
79% vs 51% ^ = 28% pts. $x^2 = 33.48$ $p < .001$

Retention To Junior Year

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1986 Cohort (46% Took Seminar)
37% vs 47% ^ = 10% pts. $x^2 = 9.01$ $p < .01$

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1987 Cohort (99% Took Seminar)
37% vs 55% ^ = 18% pts. $x^2 = 30.00$ $p < .001$

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1986 Seminar Students (46% Cohort)
37% vs 61% ^ = 24% pts. $x^2 = 30.75$ $p < .001$

Fall 1986 Cohort: 46% Students Who Took Seminar vs 54% Who Did Not
61% vs 36% ^ = 25% pts. $x^2 = 25.91$ $p < .001$

Retention To Senior Year

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1986 Cohort (46% Took Seminar)
34% vs 44% ^ = 10% pts. $x^2 = 9.49$ $p < .01$

Fall 1986 Seminar Cohort: 46% Who Took Seminar vs 54% Who Did Not
59% vs 32% ^ = 27% pts. $x^2 = 29.35$ $p < .001$

Table 2

RETENTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND HISPANIC STUDENTS

	Number Retained To Soph Year	Number Retained To Junior Year	Number Retained To Senior Year	Number Retained To Next Year
1985 Cohort (No Seminar)				
N = 81	37 (46%)	26 (32%)	19 (23%)	12 (15%)
1986 Cohort (46% Freshmen Take Seminar)				
N = 75	48 (64%)	34 (45%)	33 (44%)	
1987 Cohort (99% Freshmen Take Seminar)				
N = 89	60 (67%)	43 (48%)	Not yet available	
1988 Cohort (99% Freshmen Take Seminar)				
N = 84	61 (73%)	Not yet available		

CHI SQUARE TESTS FOR STATISTICALLY SIGNIFCANT ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN MINORITY (AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC) STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND ENROLLMENT IN FRESHMAN SEMINAR

Retention To Sophomore Year

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1986 Cohort (46% Freshmen Took Seminar)
46% vs 64% ^ = 18% pts. $x^2 = 6.56$ $p < .02$

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1987 Cohort (99% Freshmen Took Seminar)
46% vs 67% ^ = 21% pts. $x^2 = 11.10$ $p < .001$

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1988 Cohort (99% Freshmen Took Seminar)
46% vs 73% ^ = 27% pts. $x^2 = 15.85$ $p < .001$

Retention To Junior Year

Fall 1985 Cohort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1986 Cohort (46% Freshmen Took Seminar)
32% vs 45% ^ = 13% pts. $x^2 = 2.88$ $p < .10$ N.S.
Fall 1985 Conort (No Seminar) vs Fall 1987 Cohort (99% Freshmen Took Seminar)
32% vs 48% ^ = 16% pts. $x^2 = 4.73$ $p < .05$

Retention To Senior Year
23% vs 44% ^ = 21% pts. $x^2 =$ $p < .01$

STARKE, MARY
January 1990

Table 3

FRESHMAN SURVEY DATA: MEASURES OF BONDING TO THE COLLEGE
RELATIONSHIPS WITH FACULTY

How many faculty members do you know whom you would feel comfortable consulting if you had a problem?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar**
Response: 0	7%	22%
Response: 2 or more	72%	63%

How many times have you spoken with faculty members outside of class this semester?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar	
Response: 0	5%	18%	p < .07
Response: 2 or more	21%	11%	

With how many faculty members have you spoken outside of class this semester?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar*
Response: 1 or more	93%	78%
Response: 4 or more	21%	10%

How satisfied are you with the attitude of the faculty towards students?-

Response: F'87: 3.95 (Ramapo) vs 3.84 (Public Colleges)-
F'88: 4.01 vs 3.85 --
(On a scale of 1 to 5; Significantly higher than the ACT national sample of 40,000 freshmen enrolled in public institutions)

How satisfied are you with the availability of your advisor?

Response: F'87: 4.03 (Ramapo) vs 3.66 (Public colleges) --
F'88: 3.91 vs 3.69 --

How satisfied are you with the information provided by your advisors?

Response: F'87: 4.02 (Ramapo) vs 3.54 (Public colleges) --
F'88: 3.86 vs 3.57 --

How satisfied are you with the concern for you as an individual?

Response: F'87: 3.61 (Ramapo) vs 3.34 (Public colleges) --
F'88: 3.50 vs 3.34 -

*** Chi Square: p < .001 ** Chi Square: p < .01 * Chi Square: p < .05
-- Two-tail T-test: p < .001 - Two-tail T-test: p < .05
Means are based on a scale of 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied).

Data are based on responses from 68%, 80%, and 80% of the 1986, 1987, and 1988 freshmen cohorts, respectively at Ramapo College. Responses from Ramapo freshmen are compared with ACT national samples of 40, 000 freshmen enrolled in public institutions.

STARKE,MARY
May 1989

Table 4

FRESHMAN SURVEY DATA: MEASURES OF BONDING TO THE COLLEGE

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

About how many extracurricular activities have you attended this semester?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar***
Response: 1 or more	94%	58%
Response: 5 to 10	32%	13%

To how many clubs or organizations do you belong? (e.g., newspaper, student government, psychology club, radio club, etc.)

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar**
Response: 1 or more	31%	9%
Response: 2 or more	9%	2%

Listed below are services and offices available to students for various purposes. Indicate your involvment with each office by selecting the response that best matches your involvement level. Place the appropriate letter in the space provided on the answer form.

(A) Have heard of the organization.
(B) Know something about what they do, where they are, etc.
(C) Used the service or attended an event they sponsored
(D) Have joined the organization

Career Planning and Placement ***
Office of Orientation and Student Assistance ***
Office of Residence Life *
Responses for Offices of Continuing Education, Specialized Services, & Basic Studies Labs approach significant differences at p <.10

COMMITTMENT TO THE COLLEGE

Do you think you will be returning to Ramapo College next semester?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar***
(A) Yes.	93%	82%
(B) No.	2%	17%
(C) Not sure.	5%	1%.

Do you think you will be graduating from Ramapo College?

	Seminar Students	Students Who Did Not Take Seminar*
(A) Yes.	34%	29%
(B) No.	29%	44%
(C) Not sure	38%	28%

*** Chi Square: p < .001 ** Chi Square: p < .01 * Chi Square: p < .05

Data are based on responses from 68% of the freshman class.

STARKE, MARY
JUNE 1990

TABLE 5

STEPWISE REGRESSION OF SAT-VERBAL SCORES, SAT-MATH SCORES, ACADEMIC INDEX, EOP STATUS, RESIDENCY, SEX, COHORT, AND COLLEGE SEMINAR GRADE ON CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Variables	GPA	SAT-V	SAT-M	ACAD INDEX	EOP	RESID	SEX	COHRT	SEM GRADE	B	
SAT-V	.24	1.00	.56	.62	.47	.19	-.03	-.81	.64	7.0	.07*
SAT-M	.18	.56	1.00	.67	.45	.18	.20	-.33	.04		-.03
ACADIND	.35	.62	.67	1.00	.37	.18	.04	.00	.17	6.87	.22*
EOP	.22	.47	.45	.37	1.00	.27	-.01	.02	.17		.02
RESID	.07	.19	.18	.18	.27	1.00	-.01	-.01	-.03		.03
SEX	-.21	-.03	-.20	.04	-.05	-.01	1.00	.05	.22	.14	.09*
COHORT	.10	-.08	-.03	.00	.02	-.01	.05	1.00	.23		.01
SEM GR	.57	.06	.04	.17	.17	-.03	.22	.23	1.00	.98	.50*
GPA	1.00	.24	.18	.35	.22	.07	.21	.10	.57		
Means	2.25								2.50		
St Dev	.82								1.08		
					Yes	Cmtr	Male	1986			
Percent of Sample					12	38	56	44			

N = 727

R^2 = .40
Adjusted R^2 = .39
R = .63*

* p < .001